



Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

Indoor Active Movement and Nature-based Play Activities

All parents want a healthy 'ohana, and an active lifestyle is one way to improve health. There is strong evidence shared by the American Academy of Pediatrics that young children experience significant benefits from spending time outdoors. These include:

- ♥ **Overall fitness level and defense against childhood obesity.** Regularly spending time outdoors increases opportunities for children to crawl, walk, climb, and run, which improves large motor skills as well as exposure to vitamin D that helps their bodies stay healthy and strong.
- ♥ **Enhanced engagement in learning.** Playing outside promotes curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking. Studies have found that children who spent more time in nature exploration had improved learning outcomes.
- ♥ **Connection to nature.** As children learn about nature, they begin to develop a connection with, and appreciation for, the natural world.

However, there may be days that it seems like you don't have time to take the keiki outside or perhaps you have limitations that prevent you from taking the children outdoors on a daily basis (e.g., physical challenges, weather, or your environment doesn't have a safe area that protect keiki from vehicle traffic). There are ways to bring some of the elements of outdoor play to keiki through some intentional planning and creativity.

This newsletter will provide you with some activity ideas to do in your indoor space that you can use with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. The activities will focus on:

- ♥ **Active movement** – opportunities for children to do moderate to vigorous physical activity over the course of the day in very short bursts (15-30 seconds).



- ♥ **Nature-based play** – allowing children to explore, play, and interact with the natural world.

This newsletter includes:

- ♥ **Age-specific information and suggestions** about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ **Featured activities** for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child's development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Resources:** for more information, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

Infants

Infants are hands-on learners whose natural curiosity helps them discover the world using their senses. According to "Caring for Our Children", infants should be taken outside two to three times per day, for as long as they can tolerate it. In addition, you can set up your environment to encourage an infant's active movement and nature-based play by bringing safe, interesting objects to him to observe or touch and by providing floor space that is clean and free of obstacles, child-proofing the environment as he gains new skills like crawling, climbing, and walking.



Here are some activity ideas for infants:

♥ **Active movement** - Start with supervised tummy time every day when baby is awake. Practice this by placing yourself or a toy just out of the infant's reach during playtime to get him to reach for you or the toy. As he gets older, bounce him on your lap; give him a wooden spoon to bang on a container; sit him near furniture and encourage him to pull himself up; or if he's crawling, have him crawl through

cardboard boxes or over pillows.

♥ **Nature-based play** - Seek out a variety of natural objects and make a sensory activity. For example, encourage him to use his ears to listen to various sounds using items that you found outside. You can have him crinkle and crunch dry leaves with his fingers or assist him stomping on the leaves with his feet or you can even make sounds by tapping twigs or nuts together.

Activity for Infants: *Leaf Sensory Bin*

What You Need:

Large plastic bin

Variety of leaves (shapes, sizes, colors)

*Make sure they are child-friendly and non-poisonous. You can check with Hawai'i Department of Agriculture <https://hdoa.hawaii.gov/pi/pest/>

Watering cans and water (optional)

What to Do:

1. Wash and dry the leaves.
2. Put all of the leaves into the bin.
3. For younger infants, take one leaf and let him hold it in his hand. He can feel the different textures and shapes.
4. For older infants, let him try crumpling the leaf and pulling the leaves off the stems. You can add watering cans and water to see if he wants to wash the leaves.
5. Talk to your infant about the leaves, using new vocabulary to describe each item (e.g., green, pokey, crunchy, wet).

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)



Toddlers

According to "Caring for Our Children", toddlers should be allowed 60 to 90 minutes per 8-hour day of moderate to vigorous physical activity. You can set up your environment to encourage a toddler's active movement and nature-based play by giving him large spaces to be physically active and defined areas for messy play that support exploration and learning (e.g., spread out a tarp before playing with a container of sand). In addition, to help with large and small motor development, toddlers would benefit from having access to equipment for climbing, riding toys, balls, and large interlocking blocks and puzzles.

Here are some activity ideas for toddlers:

♥ **Active movement** – Incorporate short movement activities throughout the day through songs like "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" that encourage the child to stand up and row his boat; or silly games such as "Move Like an Animal" (e.g., slither like snakes and various animals). During routine tasks such as going to wash his hands, incorporate movement by



having him jump in place three times then walk to the sink to wash his hands.

♥ **Nature-based play** – Toddlers may enjoy messy play such as digging in a sand box/bin with shovels and spoons, playing with ice cubes on a food tray (you can even make ice cubes of different colors by adding 2-3 drops of food coloring to the water in the ice cube tray before freezing), or doing art projects such as finger painting with mud, leaf rubbings, or a collage using grass, leaves, and twigs.

Activity for Toddlers: *Seed Exploration*

Adapted from San Diego Children's Discovery Museum

What You Need:

Fruits and vegetables
Cutting board
Knife (adult use only)

What to Do:

1. Wash the fruits and vegetables. Pat them dry. Observe each item and have the child guess what kind of seed or seeds they have inside them. You can ask, "Which one do you think will have the biggest seed?"
2. Cut each item in half to open it up (adults only). Have the child look at the seed or seeds inside and describe what he sees.
3. Encourage your child to take the seed out of each fruit and vegetable and describe how they feel.
4. After you're done with the activity, you can take some of the seeds and put them on a plate to dry out in the sun for a few days. Then place the seeds on a wet paper towel. Daily, check on the seeds making sure the paper towel stays wet. After a few days, the seeds may start to grow roots. You can then plant the seeds in some soil.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)



Preschoolers

"Caring for Our Children" recommends that preschoolers should be allowed 90 to 120 minutes per 8-hour day of moderate to vigorous physical activity, including running. Your preschooler has expanded physical control which allows him to engage in more complex physical activities so you can have him participate in games that require turn taking and following directions. In addition, you can set up your environment and schedule to encourage active movement and nature-based play by having space for him to move; time for him to engage in movement activities both in the morning and afternoon; and materials that support this such as music and props for dancing, balls, hula hoops, and riding toys.

Here are some activity ideas for preschoolers:

- ♥ Active movement - Focus on the various locomotor skills (slide, gallop, underhand toss, balance, etc.) to ensure he knows different ways to move his body. For example, focus on hopping by instructing him to take off on one foot and land on the same foot. Encourage him to hop on one foot while music is playing



and when the music stops, freeze and balance on one foot. You can also encourage hopping on the right foot then switching feet, counting how many hops he can do on each foot.

- ♥ Nature-based play - Create an area where he can explore nature, and supplement his learning with books about the topic. For example, create an egg-carton garden by placing soil into an old egg carton and planting seeds. He can help with watering it daily and watching the seeds turn into small shoots. Or start an insect box by collecting caterpillars and observing them as they turn into butterflies.

Activity for Preschoolers: *Bubble Wrap Jumping*

Adapted from Active Play! Fun Physical Activities for Young Children by Diane Craft

What You Need:

- Recycled card board (e.g., cereal or cracker box)
- Marker pen or crayons
- Scissors – both adult and child safety

What to Do:

1. Tape the bubble wrap to the floor, making sure the wrap is securely on the floor.
2. Give instructions that include:
 - Move in only one direction when jumping the length of the wrap.
 - No return trips if more than one child is jumping at the same time.
3. Demonstrate how to jump, instructing the child to bend his knees and lift his arms when he jumps, landing on both feet at the same time.
4. Encourage the child to jump along the path.
5. You can hold the child's hands for extra balance or you can tape squares along the wrap and have him jump from square to square to make the activity harder

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)



How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

Physical Development

- ♥ Use and strengthen large muscles such as neck, arms, and legs
- ♥ Learn to use his senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching

Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Learn to cooperate with others
- ♥ Feel important and good about himself

Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Increase his observation, listening, and understanding skills, and attention span
- ♥ Build verbal skills and vocabulary



Cognitive Development

- ♥ Recognize math concepts like numbers, sizes, shapes, sequences, volume, measurement, and time
- ♥ Develop his creativity and imagination

Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons such as math (quantities, measurement), science (how matter changes), fine motor (stirring, pouring), and literacy (print awareness). As you make this recipe with your child, talk about kitchen safety. Show him how to handle items safely and allow him to do as much as he is capable of. Praise his efforts, and ask questions throughout the process to encourage his thinking skills. Most of all, have fun!

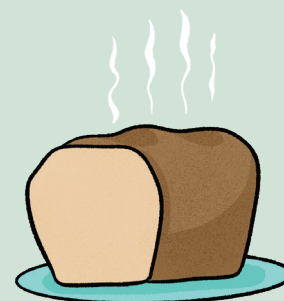
Bread in a Bag

Adapted from myplate.gov

Ingredients:

2 cups flour (all-purpose, plus extra for kneading)
1 cup flour (whole wheat)
3 T milk (powdered, nonfat)
3 T sugar
1 teaspoon salt

1 T yeast (rapid rise)
3 T vegetable oil
1 cup warm water (120-130 degrees F)
Flour (as needed, extra for kneading)



Directions:

1. Combine flour, whole wheat flour, yeast, sugar, salt, and powdered milk in a one- gallon re-sealable freezer bag. Squeeze the air out and seal the bag.
2. Have your child jump and shake the bag to blend the ingredients.
3. Add oil and warm water to the dry ingredients. Reseal the bag. Mix the ingredients together by working the bag with your fingers until the dough is completely mixed and pulls away from the bag.
4. On a floured surface, knead the dough for 5 minutes or until it is smooth and elastic, adding flour as needed. Put the dough back into the bag and let it rest for 10 minutes.
5. Shape dough on a greased baking sheet or put it into a 4x8 greased loaf pan. Cover with a clean cloth or plastic wrap and let it rise until it doubles in size.
6. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F and bake for 30 minutes or until golden brown. Place a toothpick into the middle of the bread and it should come out clean.
7. Remove from pan and cool on a wire rack or clean dish towel.

Resources

Physical Activity Toolkit for Preschool-Aged Children

https://uccalfresh.ucdavis.edu/sites/g/files/dgvnsk2286/files/inline-files/ECE_PA_Toolkit.pdf

This resource provides practical tools, including easy-to-use activities, skill cards, and planning suggestions for use with young preschool aged children.

Nature-Based Learning and Development

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/learning-environments/article/nature-based-learning-development>

Nature play is important for keiki, families, staff, and communities. New research indicates that children who regularly play in nature are growing up healthy, smart, and happy. This resource provides a video series, resources, and nature-based activities.



Suggested Books

Discover these books and more at the **Hawai'i State Public Library** www.librarieshawaii.org.

Infants and Toddlers

***My Big Animal Book* by Roger Priddy**

This big sturdy board book showcases bright photographs of all different kinds of animals. Each animal picture has their name written underneath so that children can learn what they are called and start to match the word and their picture.

***Clap Your Hands* by Lorinda Bryan Cauley**

This rhyming book provides fun instructions to have keiki join the group of animals and children as they stomp, wiggle, roar, and spin their way through the day.

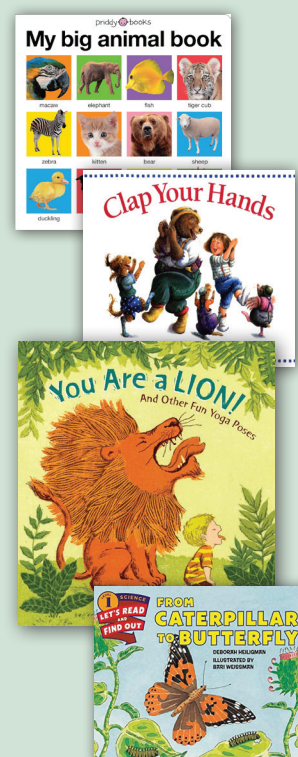
Preschoolers

***You Are a Lion!: And Other Fun Yoga Poses* by Taeun Yoo**

This book invites keiki to enjoy yoga by assuming playful animal poses. Yoga is great for kids because it promotes flexibility and focus.

***From Caterpillar to Butterfly* by Deborah Heiligman**

This nonfiction picture book introduces new words about the caterpillar's life cycle and is a great tool to use as keiki explore how a caterpillar becomes a butterfly.



Learning to Grow is a project of the University of Hawai'i, Windward Community College, with funding from the Hawai'i Department of Human Services. Visit our website at www.learningtogrowhawaii.org or visit us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/learningtogrowhawaii